

Fifth-graders gather at Kirtland to 'colonize' Mars

by Rich Garcia, Directed Energy Directorate

KIRTLAND AFB, N.M. — An estimated 1,000 fifth graders from 27 area elementary schools recently spent a Saturday constructing a grouping of inflatable shelters linked together to form a simulated earth colony for the planet Mars.

This gathering for the Air Force Research Laboratory's "Mars Millennium Mission" culminates eight months of study about the "red" planet by these fifth graders and the opportunity for the youngsters to show off what they have learned.

The event included demonstrations by five-to-seven-person student teams on life support systems they developed for Mars. These support systems include air and water supply, waste management, temperature control, food production, communications, transportation and recreation.

In its sixth year, the project is based on the Challenger Center's Marsville Program and is designed as a learning experience to teach students about teamwork and problem solving, and to enhance the study of math, science, and engineering. Students are exposed to technological and environmental space exploration issues.

During this five-hour meeting, the students constructed their habitats, underwent a "uniform" inspection, briefed each other on the life support systems they have built and completed a mission log. They weighed their bag lunches because every cargo-pound must be accounted for if they were actually rocketing to Mars.

During the course of this project, the student teams stayed in touch with each other with computers, fax machines and on the telephone, but the most recent event was the first time



AN 'OUT OF THIS WORLD' COLONY— More than 1,000 5th grade students, their teachers and parents, representing 27 area schools, participate in "Mars Millennium." During the event, held March 25, the students set up a Martian colony consisting of connecting, inflatable shelters. The gathering culminated eight months of study about the "red" planet.

they have met each other face to face. Students greeted each other by recounting their journey in a ballad they wrote in their classrooms.

There was also a second, similar event in Albuquerque on April 7th for additional elementary school teams.

As part of the Air Force Research Laboratory's Mars Millennium Mission, other New Mexico sites also held their regional link-up events. The first one took place on March 24th in Deming. Then on April 7th, Artesia, Farmington, Hatch, Ruidoso and Tucumcari had their link-up events. @